

## THE SACRED BODY AND THE FASCINATION OF ORTHOPRAXY: THE RELIGIOUS CORPUS OF HUNGARIAN MUSLIM WOMEN

**Abstract:** Nowhere is the crisis of the post-modern subject more evident than in its representations of the body. Post-modernity wavers, anxiously, between embodiment and dis-embodiment. It is argued, here, that the orthoprax appeal of Islam to European converts stems from its emphasis on the purification of the individual and collective bodies. Islamic law provides an ethical and legal springboard, albeit pre-modern, the aim of which is to frame the scattered body and to set its boundaries in time and space. Our data come from the corpus of religious texts (94 documents) produced and distributed by members of the group *Iszlám és a nők* ("Islam and women"), established by Hungarian Muslim women in Budapest, and uploaded to the documents of the Facebook site of the community. Most of the documents are transcripts or handouts for lectures on various subjects.

**Keywords:** Body, orthopraxy, Hungarian Muslim women, conversion, religious corpus.

Human beings are fascinated, confused and tormented by their bodies. A glance at everyday cultural content attests to the overwhelming presence of the body. *The Walking Dead*, currently one of the most popular TV shows, displays the body in all its positions: the philosophical problem of the body and the soul, tattoos, violence, superstition, dead bodies, demons, trance, etc. Here lies a dismantled body, both of individuals and of groups, in a flayed way, reminiscent of Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. As modernity unchained the body from the limits of religion and other traditional structures, a high risk emerged: the body without frame. Reason became soon unable to control this fresh and new modern body. Post-modernity is not at ease with the body either. All at once, it re-discovers the need to embody things, to question the body and to put limits to its freedom.

The post-modern discomfort with the body benefits to religion, especially to lived or practiced religion. The body exalts in lived religions while, at the same time, it voluntarily submits to the ritual and order. As A. Zito puts it,

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“It is through the practical, ritual, and moral maintenance of embodied persons that religions thrive or fail, and this maintenance does entail an enormity of material sustenance/support/contrivance. But at its center, as its motor and goal, lay the energy and the puzzle of the embodied human self”.<sup>1</sup>

Religions have always been intriguing ways to control the body. Whatever the religious form one embraces, it will find out, at one point or another that its priority is to frame the body.

For example, Islam requires the converts to purify their bodies, *ghusl* before pronouncing the faith testimony; they should take a shower (presumably to purify the body from impurities of the body and the soul). It is a religion that built its legitimacy on controlling *jāhiliyya*, a pagan unchained body. In the modern Islamic ideology, there exists, as well, an overstated fascination with the body; Islamists are ensnared with the women’s body as they reacted the veil, a symbol of this fascination in reverse.<sup>2</sup> Radical Islamic movements sustain a fascist fascination with the body: trained, black masked young men, military allure who behead their victims. Islam’s resistance to modernity (to free the body) and use of the problematic relationship with the body in post-modernity appeal to the seekers of orthopraxy.

It is contended here that the primary reason Hungarian Muslim women converted to Islam is its orthoprax appeal. This appears clearly from the corpus of texts in Hungarian made available to the members of the Facebook group *Islám és a nők*, the most active group of Hungarian Muslim women in both virtual and real spheres. We do not argue, like D. Winchester, that converts produce new moral selves in and through the use of embodied religious practices of ritual prayer, fasting and covering formed within converts the moral dispositions, or habitus, associated with becoming a “good Muslim.”<sup>3</sup> Instead, we contest that converts to Islam seek to mould themselves into an image of a good Muslim or a moral self. Such ideal does not exist and cannot exist. Representations of a good Muslim do exist, of course. But, then, one has to understand the rationale of these representations, which in our view, lies in the crisis of the post-modern subject. In particular, the quest of an unyielding moral frame indicates a crisis of the body. Conversion is but a turn in this crisis and an attempt to solve it. Soon, the converts are doomed to discover that there is no solution indeed.

1 ZITO 2011. 20.

2 MALTI-DOUGLAS 1995. 67-75.

3 WINCHESTER 2008. 1753.

## Mapping the religion: law, faith and ethics

It is symptomatic of the post-modern age that religions can no longer rely on authority to establish a fixed interpretation or representation of their beliefs. There is an increasing need for guide books to all religions, which unsurprisingly differ from each other. No repertoire of Islamic texts today can do without a map. Islam, especially Sunni Islam, appears as an ocean of traditions with very few milestones (the texts of the Qur'an and Muḥammad's traditions to which our informants do not have direct access), but people today express the need to live religion. Additionally, Islam is also a civilization that spans the period of 14 centuries until the modern times. Any overview of this religion is ultimately reductive and selective.

### 1) *Overviewing Islam*

One way of mapping Islam is the trilateral approach: Islam is defined as faith (*īmān*), law (*islām*) and ethics (*iḥsān*), a classification which is based on a tradition of the Prophet, known as the "Gabriel tradition". This mapping reflects the need of subjects to understand and construct Islam in a comprehensible way. In this sense, *Islām és a nők* choose this trilateral approach as a gate to Islam, rephrasing it as follows: the three ways according to which we might build our faith.

Our informants have recourse to a set of rhetoric strategies to build up a coherent frame of Islam. The most evident strategy is asking questions. For example: Every religion teaches that human beings should do the good. Why then should one follow Islam precisely? What does a school of religious law (*madhhab*) mean? And why is it necessary to follow one of them? Sometimes, the questions reflect a genuine didactic interest in explaining the terminology and the tenets of Islam. Often, the questions respond to the polemics against Islam and set to persuade the reader that Islam is the right path to go. An example would be the following questions: did Islam spread by sword? Why did the Prophet Muḥammad take many wives?

A second strategy is brevity whereby the documents are shortly entitled and concisely written in order to offer to the reader the essential of the matter. For example, one can read documents entitled pilgrimage, polygamy or women's education in few pages. This corpus is not modelled after "Islam for the dummies". For the primary readers, this corpus addresses are Hungarian Muslim women. This can be inferred from the debates among Muslim scholars these documents recall. There is also a considerable deal of Islamic vocabulary and technical details of Islamic law. Instead, these short pieces are meant to lead the reader to think that Islam's position on pilgrimage is simple and could be reduced to few statements; simple semiotics of a complex religion. Longer pieces would mean longer debates, nuances, probability and uncertainty and, above all, fragmentation of

the body of knowledge (which is the reality of any culture or religion). A secondary female reader might be interested as a potential target of Islamic mission (*da'wa*). Such reader is also addressed. Conciseness is there to offer her the "straight answer" about the issue she would pick up to read. Inside the text, she would encounter many sentences the function of which is persuading her that Islam provides concrete divine solutions of the problems she faces. Considered in the context of "profligate information", an effective body of knowledge should provide quickly and tightly the answer.

Comparison is probably the most suitable strategy for missionary work. Predictably, comparison takes places between Christianity and Islam. The members of the group were born Christians (predominantly Catholic) before becoming Muslims. The documents compare Islam and Christianity on a theological level, especially on Christology and Eva's sin. This is a common motif of Muslim apologetic from the Quran to the Internet. The significance of such documents lies in the illusion they give that Islam and Christianity could be compared in a document, or be compared at all in a way to make one of them defeat the other. Additionally, being ex-Christians, such comparisons allow the members of the group to exorcise the other in themselves. That is, while alterity (Christianity) which forms an inseparable part of their identity, for they cannot delete what they were from what they are for obvious physical and cultural reasons, opposing the two religions bluntly and in a live-or-die fight, these agents acquire the unity of the their spiritual body.

These examples of rhetoric strategies succeed in offering an engaging "body of knowledge" (through questions, conciseness and comparisons) to readers on Facebook, with little time, and quests of the essential. This embodiment of a religious and post-modern Ockham's razor, draws also on Islam's position in the history of religions, or rather in the history of religious rhetoric. Islam presented itself, as mirrored by the written and canonized religious documents, as the simple way of divine truth in the middle of misleading religions.

## 2) Law

Out of 94 documents, some 48 documents concern law. Within this legal content, ritual, the most regular human tool for framing the body, emerges as predominant. In particular, body purity and prayer (which go hand in hand in Islam), stand at the heart of the corpus. *Dhikr* (invocations) and surrogatory prayers complete the five daily prayers. There are no questions related to paying almsgiving (a financial obligation towards the poor) or fasting Ramadan (a physical ritual). One cannot explain such absence with the discarding of the community body in favour of the individual body; pilgrimage and other community activities are covered.

However, unmistakably, the body of the individual attracts more focus than the community body. Death and burial, also topics of perennial human anxiety,

are present. Behind body ritual, family law issues are important: divorce, heritage and marriage. Of particular interest are the questions of the veil, polygamy, intermarriage and menstruation as they all touch directly female body and intimacy. The corpus includes also two questions of prohibited substances, considered impure in Islam: alcohol and swine. Interest in terminology of law and the different categories of legal qualifications: invalidating, forbidden, permissible, reprehensible, recommended and obligatory shows the need to control a law that is, after all, complex.

That prayer and family law dominate the section on law and the whole corpus, is indicative of how important the body stands for the Hungarian Muslim women. Obligatory prayer, preceded by body purification, *wuḍūʾ*, is performed five times a day repetitively creating moments and spaces, every couple of hours, to get into the frame of worshipping God. These five prayers are completed with other prayers such as the prayer of need, the prayer of repentance, and invocations. The prayer in Islam does not follow the pattern of prayers in Christianity, to which Hungarian Muslim women are used to. It is an exercise, both physical and spiritual, of a couple of 5-10 minutes. As women cannot voice their recitation of the Quran during the prayer, silence could be an instigator of a further absorption into the communion with God. Women should also wear the veil during the prayers (at home) to perform the prayer, sacralising, thus, the body and the moment. It is a sport of the spirit and the body, as described by the very popular Muslim author today Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.<sup>4</sup>

As for the family issues, they invest the female body and its gender roles. Islam offers a submissive role to women that could appeal to some ambiguous post-modern subjects who interpret this submission to be without humiliation and a sort of freedom without self-determination; that is to say, a framed body without slavery. As a traditional and, therefore conservative, system of social order, Islamic law might seem to some women more assuring than the uncertainty of post-modern family. This paradox is best exemplified by the so-called Islamic feminism which is currently *en vogue* even in some Western universities.

Among the Sunni schools of law, the corpus shows preference for the Ḥanafī school. A historical reason explains this choice. The group of Hungarian Muslim women is led by members of the community of *Magyar Iszlám Közösség*, founded by Mihálffy Balázs and Bolek Zoltán who embraced a Sufi Turkish interpretation of Islam.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation follows the Ḥanafī school.

One dimension that is closely related to law is obligation. Islamic law, like any ancient or medieval law, enjoins the believer to accept the legal obligations as a sign of submission to God. Abdolkarim Soroush succinctly put it as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> IBN QAYYIM AL-JAWIYYA 1998. 279.

<sup>5</sup> Zoltán Bolek has translated a work ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) the founder of the Ḥanafī school: ABU HANIFAH, *al-Fiqh al-akbar*, trans. Arslan Yvette and Bolek Zoltán, Magyar Iszlám Közösség, 2014.

“The language of religion and religious law is the language of duties, not rights; religious people habitually think more about their obligations than about their rights. They concentrate more on what God expects from them than on what they themselves desire. They look among their duties to find their rights, not vice versa”.<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, modernity shifts the focus from obligations to rights, and humans increase the area of their rights, perceiving their duties as the respect of the others' rights. Post-modernity re-introduces obligations. There might be here a convergence of pre-modern Muslim assertion of obligations and post-modern annoyance with rights.

### 3) Ethics

In Islam, ethics are a branch, an auxiliary or the purpose of law. There are certainly non-legalistic interpretations of ethics of Greek, Persian and Sufi origins. Furthermore, even the texts and the authoritative moral traditions of Islam represent a dimension of faith and consciousness, like in other religions and systems of belief. It is, however, a fact that the dominating interpretations of Sunni and Shi'i Islam adhere to legalistic ethics of three sources: divine commands, principled ethics and model-ethics (following the Prophet, his companions and his family). Since God is the law-giver and knows best the good and the bad, and God communicated his command through revelation, it is the obligation of the individual to follow the revealed law (the precise meaning of *sharī'a*). Ethics is a perfection of this law. That is the sense of *ihsān*, perfection or excellence whereby the believer seeks to engage a spiritual dimension in the application of religion.

The corpus of *Iszlám és a nők* clearly adheres to ethics as model-ethics of the Prophet. Moral theology appears four times in the corpus: on the notion of natural disposition, on common sense, on the heart and the reason, and on the personal responsibility of human acts. One ethical issue that attracts attention of the reader is the emphasis on the great difference between Muslims and Islam, which argues that Islam is a perfect religion, but that Muslims today are far from applying Islam. This stems from model-ethics. The model of the Prophet and his companions, for the Sunnis, is considered perfect and the rest of Muslims have to be checked against this model. By the nature of things, time corrupts the rest of Muslims who are increasingly a disgrace to Islam. They cannot be trusted unless they stick more vehemently to law. This means that the more a generation is far from the “original” model in time and behaviour, the more it needs law, hence the *sharī'a*-addiction of modern Islam. Issues of bioethics such as abortion and transplantation are treated in a legalistic way as well.

Markedly, the corpus promotes Sunna, the way of the Prophet, as the model-ethics to follow. This is another locus of embodiment. Despite its orthoprax

6 SOROUGH 2000. 129-130.

character, Islam still has a variety of interpretations that could confuse the seeker of the right path. The Prophet emerges, today, probably more than any time in the history of Islam, as an embodiment of the perfect Islam (to save Muslims from “corrupted” interpretations). One document asks the following question: what did the Prophet read after the opening chapter of the Quran in the prayer? Even if the law leaves the believer freedom to choose among 113 Quranic chapters a chapter or a part of it to recite in the prayer (in addition to the first chapter which is obligatory), following the Prophet’s way is almost inevitably the consequence of the legalistic-moralistic strong frame of Islam. One cannot but recall here what Brannon Wheeler says about the relationship between the prophet Muḥammad’s sacrifice of the camels and the distribution of his hair at the conclusion of his farewell pilgrimage just before his death and the outset of Islam:

„The prophet Muḥammad’s distribution of his hair, detached from his body at the time of his desacralization from the *Hajj* delineates the Meccan sanctuary as the place of origination from which was spread both the physical and textual corpus of the Prophet’s life. Whether by design or not, the traditional Islamic descriptions of this episode from the life of the prophet Muḥammad are not unlike narratives found in Buddhist, Iranian, Christian and other traditions in which the body of a primal being is dismembered to create a new social order. Through the gift of the sacrificial camels and parts of his own body, the prophet Muḥammad is portrayed, in this episode, as making a figurative and literal offering of himself at the origins of Islamic civilization.”<sup>7</sup>

The model can also be a woman, especially for the group members, and ‘Ā’isha, the preferred and beloved woman of Muḥammad, incarnates for Sunnis the perfect model. An entire document is dedicated to her.

#### 4) *Faith*

Only 16 documents relay to faith and four out of six pillars of Sunni faith are covered: the belief in God, the prophets, the angels and the Judgment Day. The corpus uses the word Allah, rather than God to mark the boundary between Allah and the Gods of the others. Besides, the Prophets are looked at according to the Quranic narrative that starts with Adam and ends with Muḥammad. The belief in revelations and the predestination are missing. Avoiding the books of the others (Christians and Jews) is because they are anyway false while predestination

<sup>7</sup> WHEELER 2010. 341. See also the excellent article of Denis Gril in which he shows the Companions’ veneration of the Prophet’s body, „as if physical contact with him places them directly in the presence of a sacred reality”: GRIL 2006. 48.



stands against subjectivity. Predestination could also lead to a backlash: polemics against Islam focus usually on its fatalism.

A prominent feature of discourse on faith is comparison with Christianity and polemics as indicated above. Seven documents compare globally the two religions. A recurrent topic of comparison and of Muslim polemics is the guilt of Eve. This is covered in three documents. The point of this comparison is to prove that Islam is superior to Christianity because it does not consider Eve guilty of the fall of Adam from heaven. On the contrary, this indicates that Islam gives more rights to women than does Christianity. This fallacy ignores the fact that the rights of women today are acquired thanks to Western modernity. The jump has been from pre-modern societies to modern ones and Muslim societies are still considerably pre-modern. Medieval or ancient Christian societies were as patriarchal as Muslim societies. Even if Western modernity emerged in Christian societies, it did so against the Christian system of values. Therefore, comparison is not reason here.

Why would a post-modern subject compare Christianity and Islam and find satisfaction in a system of belief that allegedly treats better women while there is a third system which does better than the first two? The answer is that the third system is secular and leaves women to themselves, on the track of rights. As the post-modern agent looks for rules, obligations and boundaries, it consciously prefers pre-modern systems. Some European women, non-Muslim, often would say remarks such as: is it *really* that modernity gives more rights to women?

## Orthopraxy

It appears clear from the previous section that orthopraxy, more than orthodoxy, attracts the group into Islamic teachings. In the following, we suggest a closer reading of the legalistic material we described so far in general terms.

### 1) *Law abiding believer*

To understand the importance of law in Islam, one has to grasp its relationship to faith and the boundaries of disbelief. Most Muslim theological schools have made acts expressions of belief. The Quran and *sunna*, the two main sources of Islamic law, make it clear that the believer should respect, in all due, the divine commandments. For example, failing to practice prayer everyday five times, voluntarily, is an act of disbelief. Moreover, Islamic law claims to cover all aspects of life, from birth to death, and from the first moment in the day (which should start with ablution and prayer) until going to bed (with a special invocation for that). This leaves almost nothing out of the authority of law.



## 2) Purification

What lies at the heart of the corpus is purification.<sup>8</sup> Ablution and prayer are both acts of purifying the body before meeting God. Pilgrimage is also an act of purification. After the death of the body, there is concern about its purification before burial. One document speaks about the natural disposition which is pure from other than Islam and/or monotheism, supposed to be the only pure and authentic religions. Alcohol and swine are impure foods. Details are given about menstruation and how it makes the body impure.

## 3) Reciting the Quran

The Quran itself is a body of text. It literarily and symbolically indicates Islam. Reciting the Quran is considered an act of adoration in Islam, *'ibāda* and, therefore, could not be performed while the body is impure. For example, a non-Muslim or a Muslim who did not take a shower or do the ablution or a woman in state of menstruation should not read or touch the Quran. Reading or listening to the Quran transforms the body and the soul. There is also an introduction to the Quran. The corpus is interested in specific chapters, selected and explained: Chapters 1 and 2. The first is the most important because its reading is obligatory in the prayer and because it summarizes the religion of Islam as submission to God. The Second Chapter is the largest in the Quran and contains various legal and non-legal matters. The group suggests a document with short *suras* and verses to be used for the prayer. There is the exegesis of Chapter 12 (Joseph), the one favourite chapters of Muslims today, telling the story of this Biblical prophet who triumphed over temptation and desire. Finally, an important hermeneutic question is asked: what are the commandments of the Quran which are obligatory?

The Quran plays a major role in the modern piety of Muslim women. In this regard, Saba Mahmoud has shown through the case of Egyptian Muslim women that "reciting short verses of the Quran and other supplicatory prayers (*awrād*)<sup>9</sup>, which members of the audience could memorize and repeat during the day, impart a sense of benediction to their chores".<sup>10</sup>

## 4) Worshipping

As mentioned above, every lawful act done by a Muslim, is an act of worshipping and is compensated accordingly. However, a more narrow sense of worshipping does exist, that of performing acts of prayer or invocation to adore God.

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<sup>8</sup> Studies on the body in Islam that showed the importance of purification to this religion are legion. Suffices here to mention three studies: KHURI 2001. 49-59 ; KATZ 2002. 29-57; BELHAJ 2014. 41-53. Atmane Aggoun goes as far to speak of the « the obsession of purity » in Islam: AGGOUN 2010. 120-134.

<sup>9</sup> We encountered in our Hungarian case under the name of *dhikr*

<sup>10</sup> MAHMOUD 2005. 93.

Invocation is less and prayer is much present. Invocation is a free act that can be done at anytime and there is no single obligatory formula. Prayer, on the other hand, is an obligatory act (the five day prayers) and forms a pillar of Islam. Additionally, surrogatory prayers, the ones that occur occasionally or daily, but only recommended, offer opportunities to get in the frame of devotion to God.

Obligatory prayers are detailed and explained in the corpus, starting from ablution to the prayer of the mosque (performed when the person enters the mosque and before the start of official collective prayer). An important issue the corpus discusses, in this regard, is the replacement of prayers in case a person misses the exact time of the prayer. Replacement is important for our informants because of the rhythm of modern life: work and sleep. Pre-modern time and prayers correspond to pre-industrial societies, agricultural or nomadic, in which the sun regulates the moments of activity and prayer. In modern societies, work, at the office or at the factory, rules over the day. The subject loses control over time. Prayer could be then an occasion of a time-out, even if performed out of its time.

The occasional prayers are interesting in themselves: prayer of the need and prayer of repentance which establish a direct relationship with God, a confession and quest of help. It is a Christian religious emotion, performed in physical exercises since any prayer in Islam is a physical activity.

Repetition of daily and surrogatory prayers inscribes the religion in the body (as an individual and as a community). This repetitive performance could be seen as a "spoiled devotional rite by making them altogether mechanical"<sup>11</sup>. A British traveller in the 19<sup>th</sup> century said that "the ablution before prayer is a ceremony altogether beautiful in its conception, and touchingly appropriate in its religious sentiments, is marred by its mechanical execution. The same is true of the attitudes of the prayer. These are assumed with a mechanical uniformity quite foreign to a true devotion".<sup>12</sup> Precisely, it is about mechanics. This repetition creates a bond with God and with the community so strong with time, even if it is shallow in terms of spirituality.

## Subjugating the body

Hitherto, we have described the religious map promoted by the Group of Hungarian Muslim women. It is our intention now to go a step further to attend to the functions of this religious discourse which we claim to be mainly controlling the body. For a post-modern subject, the body is too free and needs limits.

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11 STARRETT 1995. 956.

12 STARRETT 1995. 956.

### 1) *Why orthopraxy?*

As we explored the essential and multiform link between the corpus of religion and body, an immediate question emerges: what is the function of orthopraxy in the lives of these women? The post-modern illusionary quest for boundaries could be the reason of the turn to orthopraxy. For some post-modern subjects, Islam offers the right way; it controls the posture, the space and the extension of the body. For the Hungarian Muslim women, the right practice goes hand in hand with the right life and the right deployment in time and space. Only the religion that could contain all dimensions of the body could be right. Orthopraxy provides embodiment; a very sought after object in post-modernity. Piety then is not requested for its own sake or in order to be a good Muslim or to be a right person. The post-modern subject needs benchmarks to feel some order around it. The quest for order could be the ultimate reason these women find refuge in Islam.

Paradoxically, orthopraxy is also the gate to lived religion. Consider for example how Sufism started as a movement of religious fervour, practice and ascetics and ended as a metaphysical doctrine and heterodox in opposition to *sharī'a*. As the individual fails to respect regularly the orthoprax way (let us say waking up everyday at 4 in the morning to fulfil the dawn prayer), the individual starts a process of accommodating orthopraxy, enjoying a freedom within the boundaries. It also starts to live by the rules, knowing when to bypass them and go back to the right path. A favourite subject of *fatwas* is dispensation, *rukḥṣa*. Repentance, *taṭwba* becomes the return ticket to the mercy of God. It is also a mark of agency, that the believer controls its life. For a modern subject, this is mere hypocrisy, but for a post-modern subject, it is the middle way between rigidity (supposed to be pre-modern) and permissibility (modernity).

As it realises the limits and the burdens of being the subject, alone in the world, the post-modern individual rediscovers the need to be an object. Hence the quest for submission to a divine order, as it is aware that submission to another human order is absurd. This divine order, the more it is self-confident and assertive, the more it gives, albeit for a while, the feeling of belonging to God and to His realm; servitude to God and freedom from all the rest, repugnant for a modern subject, appears attractive for a post-modern person. Feeling as an object to God's will in a post-modern world does not rule out being a subject of its modern world. The quest for submission could be misleading today as it appeals both to Muslims and European converts to Islam for different reasons; born Muslims are afraid of modernity which destroy their pre-modern world and consider submission to God as a shelter in a post-apocalyptic world. To Western converts, submission is a sweet and mystic emotion in a post-rational and post-differentiated world; a nostalgia of pre-modernity.

There remains the issue of orthopraxy as communication, a central notion to our transformations today. In a different, but comparable, religious context, it has been exposed that the body is a mediator or a semiotic resource, the

function of which is linking the body with other bodies and with the transcendent through religious practice. The body, then, enters into a state of embodied prayer (communion).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, an embodied prayer has limits, at least in the Muslim context. For being with God and feeling its presence could be an embodiment, but what kind of body, then, God could be? It is the whole problem faced by Sufis, union with God, being embodied by God, or witnessing its presence.

## 2) Women's body

Women's body is probably the most controversial field of clash between Islam and modernity. The texts of Islam as well as Muslim societies and cultures promote patriarchy and overlook women. This could not be otherwise in a pre-modern world. Modernity still struggles to free women's bodies among Muslims in the Muslim world as well as in the West.

Still, some European women voluntarily accept to give back their bodies to tradition. In a post-modern age, ethical and esthetical standards seem chaotic and fragmented. For many women, this is confusing. There must be an *objective* standard against which a woman's body should be ethically and aesthetically evaluated. Otherwise, motherhood, a biological and cultural process, loses its meaning. Hippism and nudism are post-modern signs of de-objectification of ethics and aesthetics. In *The Walking Dead*, every time and then, the protagonists need a safe place to re-establish ethical standards and to be *human* again. Their bodies are tired, and so is the audience, from killing other bodies. A rejection of subjective standards in post-modernity leads to a pursuit of boundaries. Every *body* needs a break.

Protecting the body is one of the post-modern placebo solutions to "deobjectivation" of norms. Here comes the veil. M. H. Benkheira explains the function of the veil this way "The veil protects from the offence not in the same way an umbrella protects from the rain or a coat from the wind, but rather as a sign which attests of the woman's body as taboo"<sup>14</sup>. This placebo-protection is best expressed by one document in a classic, still a fallacious way by a document in the corpus:

"Suppose you have two sisters who are twins, they are both equally beautiful. Strolling down the street, one of them is dressed according to Islamic veil, so only her face and hands to the wrists appears. The other twin girl wears Western clothes, a mini skirt or shorts. In one corner, there is a hooligan or ruffian who is waiting to pass at a girl. Who will make a pass? The veiled or non-veiled girl? Of course, the one wearing miniskirts or shorts will make a pass at

<sup>13</sup> CORWIN 2012. 396.

<sup>14</sup> BENKHEIRA 1997. 58. To date, the most comprehensive scholarly study on body and Islamic law is: KRAWIEZ 1991. For a general and passionate introduction to the body in Islam beyond the texts of Islam, see: CHEBEL 1999. For a short overview of the body in Islam limited to the religious literature, see: WINTER 1995. 36-45.

her. These clothes are an indirect invitation to the opposite sex, and let him know that you can start with me. The Qur'an rightly argued that the veil protects women from being upset."<sup>15</sup>

Islamic law as a protector from a Western civilisation going astray is indeed a shared belief among Muslims, moderates and conservatives alike. "Detabooisation" of the body in modernity, a process that continues in considerable dimensions in the last fifty years, calls for a "retabooisation". For our Hungarian Muslim women, and for other converts we met in other European countries, post-modernity calls for *sharī'a*:

"The United States is reportedly one of the most advanced countries in the world. In addition, there occurs most often violence against women throughout the world. An FBI report, according to the 1990 year, a daily average of 1,756 cases of rape in the United State [...] Imagine the scenario that if the American people are complying with the requirements of the veil. Whenever a man looks at a woman indecently, with shameless thoughts entering his mind, he looks down. Every woman wears the veil, so the whole body is covered except the face and hands of the elbow. After all, if a man yet rapes a woman, you get the death penalty. Let me ask you now, the number of violence will increase, stay the same, or will decrease? The introduction of *sharī'a* reduces the proportion of rape. Of course, as soon *sharī'a* is introduced, the positive results will inevitably appear. If the Islamic *sharī'a* is introduced anywhere in the world, whether in America or Europe, society will breathe more freely. The veil does not demean the woman, but rather raises her and preserves her dignity and purity."<sup>16</sup>

Purity is also at stake in intermarriage. Muslim women in Singapore accept close friendship with non-Muslim men, but refuse to any

"Physical intimate relations [...] they want to remain religiously pure by only marrying other Muslims [...] it is a defensive strategy

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15 A current of ideas within Western feminism and dominating among „Muslim academics" is to defend the veil as a symbol of „liberation of women". See a recent example: AL-MAHADIN 2013. 3-18. Compare to Baber Johanson's conclusion about the institution of marriage in Islam: „which has become a symbol of social hierarchies and social exchange, a symbol of the non-commercial world, and a symbol of a social order of a world that has passed. This symbolical function of the institution weighs heavily on the female body and its legal and social valorization. It sets a limit to women's efforts to gain access to autonomy and emancipation outside the hierarchies of gender and kinship. It transforms the woman's body itself into a symbol of the permanence of the correct social exchange". JOHANSEN 1996. 99-100.

16 "Hijab for women" (Hidzsáb a nők számára) the handout of a lecture given by one of the members of the community in the mosque.

that allows them and the non-Muslims to engage with each other, albeit with the 'ground rules' clearly established".<sup>17</sup>

It is no different here. To the question: if wife is married to a Christian converts to Islam, what happens to their marriage? Here is the answer as stated in one document:

"The marriage shall not cease immediately. Islam should be offered to the husband. If he converts, marriage continues. If not, then the divorce happens automatically"<sup>18</sup>

The women's body is a sanctuary; it can be accessible as long as the husband breaks the bond of his body politic, joining the new body politic. It is a mechanism of quasi-endogenous marriage.

### 3) *Body transplantation*

A document written in 1874 words reiterates the post-modern need to sanctify the body. The document criticises a Muslim position that refuses categorically body transplantation, taking a progressive stance and supporting science. However, it accepts fully the Muslim premises about the metaphysical sense of the body and its physical resurrection after death. The document assures the sceptics that, in the hereafter, the body will come together, reconciling thus the concerns of religion and science. This in-between attitude preserves the integrity of the body as a self, which lies at the core of post-modern subjectivity, and the modern self-interest or benefit.

The document uses two sorts of arguments: a utilitarian argument whereby the humans benefit considerably from body transplantation and a teleological argument according to which human life is protected in Islam and body transplantation saves lives:

"It is well known that the Islamic religion with regard to life, death, the afterlife and as natural and meaningful phases, it attaches importance to the healthy, peaceful and safe life of both individuals and societies. In this sense, it is evident that the Muslim community initially hesitates regarding the issue of organ transplantation, and even be against it and rejected it based on religious reasons. These reactions guarantee the resistance of traditional community to prevent and maintain the social structure when they face an innovation. However, these days it is proven that organ transplantation is a cure that brings people back to life. So, we should solve these hesitations,

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17 NASER – PEREIRA – TURNER 2009. 252.

18 Quote from a handout distributed among women attending one of the mosques in Budapest.

step out of them and to this end, steps should be taken seriously in terms of informing people on the subject of these hesitations.”<sup>19</sup>

The document displays some anxiety; body transplantation, it maintains, should be the last resort (the necessity argument) because, after all, it definitively alters the human body. Among the jurists who allow body transplantation, there is an exception: the heart.<sup>20</sup>

Hesitation of Muslims is understandable<sup>21</sup>; considering what has been said earlier on the purity of the believer’s body, it would be meaningless to accept body transplantation. Recently, a Professor of ethics at a faculty of medicine was asked by the dean to encourage Muslim students to convince their community to donate their organs. Hesitation of Muslims is rather a pre-modern fear of impurity, disintegration and missing the physical resurrection. Our document’s author also hesitates, but for a different reason:

„We should keep in mind that in the future there will be a framework of religious principles fitting solution for organ transplantation. If only the research will cover the development of the transplant procedure, then there will be no other alternative. For this reason, experts in the field have to focus on development rather than the search for alternatives to the transplant procedure.”<sup>22</sup>

The document stresses the incapacity of science for the moment to offer the cutting-edge solution. Science has many venues, and there should be focus on one solution. Post-modern subjects do not reject science, but are disappointed in it. Religion appears more satisfying as it offers, presumably, one solution. Religious principles are flexible enough to fit this one solution.

#### *4) The community’s body*

One tradition attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad states that “the believers in their mutual love, mercy and sympathy are like one body; when any part complains, the rest of the body responds to it with wakefulness and fever”.<sup>23</sup> It is a normative statement and does not reflect the reality of Muslims from the 7<sup>th</sup> century until today. It is, however, in the spirit of time, meaning pre-modern bonds, to imagine, even for political reasons, a communal body based on belief. In modern societies, the community is the sum of individuals. Unsatisfied, post-modern

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<sup>19</sup> Quote from a text on transplantation in Islam distributed in the Hungarian Islamic Community (Magyar Iszlám Közösség)

<sup>20</sup> HOUOT 2006. 338.

<sup>21</sup> For the Muslim ethical-juristic debates about organ transplantation, see: MOOSA 2002. 329-356.

<sup>22</sup> Quote from a spreadsheet distributed among women attending one of the mosques in Budapest.

<sup>23</sup> AL- BUKHARI 1993. no. 5665.



subjects tend to recompose traditional ties to enrich their subjectivities, but not against them. Social media is the perfect tool of community in the post-modern age; it offers a community platform with the subject's control over it, (be-friending, de-friending, liking, etc.).

Overall, within this pious corpus, there is little interest in body politics. For instance, no sign of Palestine and other "Muslim causes". Nothing is written about politics *per se*, neither about the Muslim world nor about Hungary. There is a bookmarked paper about the ascension of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Pilgrimage is probably the most visible form of communal body the corpus endorses. The whole Muslim world is represented in Mecca during 10 days. There is, however, interest in the boundaries between believers and non-believers. For instance, the chapter 109 of the Quran (the Unbelievers) is mentioned three times. It is one of the most pronounced messages of dis-connection between Muslims and non-Muslims:

"In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate  
109:1 Say: 'O unbelievers, I serve not what you serve  
and you are not serving what I serve,  
nor am I serving what you have served,  
neither are you serving what I serve

109:5 To you your religion, and to me my religion!"<sup>24</sup>

The metaphor of terrorism as a poison of the body<sup>25</sup> could explain the Muslim interest in spreading information about ISIS. Our informants condemn, like most Muslims, the ideology and strategies of the ISIS. Especially in Europe, the ISIS appears as a poison to the imagined Muslim community. The ISIS works against everything Hungarian Muslims look for in Islam. Wahhabism and Saudi Arabia are seen as anomalies of Islam and responsible for violence and extremism.

Then, there is the body of the nation, Hungary. Hungarian Muslims aspire to remain part of the Hungarian communal body. For this reason, a narrative of Islam as part of the Hungarian body is under construction. The older Islam entered Hungary, the more it is recuperated. Thus, one of the documents in the corpus (4652 words) offers a detailed biography of Durics Hilmi Huszein (1887-1940), compiled from Zoltán Bolek's *A magyar iszlám története*. This is what the story of Durics Hilmi Huszein should tell us, that Hungarian Muslims form a part of the Hungarian body.

<sup>24</sup> *The Koran Interpreted* 1998. 664.

<sup>25</sup> GEORGE 2002. 161-186.

## Conclusion

A key finding of the present study was to show that, for Hungarian Muslim women, Islam is a springboard. The members of *Iszlám és a nők* do not seek to be good Muslims (as D. Winchester argues with regard to Muslim converts), but *right* subjects with control over their bodies and that of the community. Ultimately, they display an anxiety about the fragmentation of the individual and the collective bodies. For the body, individual or collective, is elusive and beyond control as post-modernity decentralises ethics and aesthetics. The fascination with Islamic orthopraxy, and with the legal and ethical boundaries it sets, attracts post-modern agents, who attempt, desperately, to get their lives together. As the world seems to fall apart, there is a need for rigour and embodiment because post-modernity seems too chaotic. Both Islam and post-modernity share a taste for post-apocalyptic quest of the safe houses.

In a fragmented post-modern age, framing bodies in religious terms is an attempt to re-situate the body. Re-situating the body uses two strategies. First, re-scheduling through religious time. The moment a body practices religion and law, in particular, it becomes situated in a religious history with a salvation time, coming from a blessed beginning and ending. Second, it is also a spiritual time that elevates the body to a celestial presence with God, through prayer; a religious time with God. Re-situating the body occurs in the space as well. Religious law establishes boundaries and spatial rules for the body: dress, pilgrimage, family laws and forbiddance. This exclusion re-activates a visible notion of the sacred. The post-modern subject looks for a sacred that is embodied while still spiritualised; another paradox of the human condition.

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